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ABSTRACT

Several articles of interest to teachers of English as a second language (ESL) are included. In "Specific Reading Skills for Secondary and Post-Secondary E.S.L. Learners," Pamela M. Riley provides some ideas for stimulating students to extract meaning from paragraphs. Thelma Grant reviews one region's variety of instructional approaches in "The Western Australian Scene." The Language Teaching Branch of the Australian Department of Education contributes "English Testing and the E.S.L. Teacher," an article that reviews various aspects of test design and describes types of tests and ways of testing the different language skills. Short reviews and notices conclude the issue. (JB)

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Vol. 3 No. 1 October, 1977

TEFL/TESL NEWSLETTER

ED200000

FOR THE INTERCHANGE OF INFORMATION AND IDEAS ON THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN AUSTRALIA

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EDITORIAL

This issue breaks with our practice of adopting a particular theme. It offers, instead, contributions on a variety of subjects. There is a statement about Western Australia's Full-Time and "Weeder-Feeder" (Part-Time Accelerated) Courses; a new development in Commonwealth elementary materials for the adult program is outlined; and an article on testing offers an idea of the scope and value of various types of test in the ESL classroom.

Pamela Riley's "Specific Reading Skills" article may move other contributors to send in some ideas on the wider theme of "The Role of Reading in TESL" which could be included in an issue of the Newsletter now in preparation.

An innovation in this number is the introduction of "Forum". "Forum" is designed to enable teachers to express themselves briefly on any aspect of TEFL/TESL, without working under the constraints of time and scholarship that apply to the writing of a full-scale article, and it is hoped that a good and continuing response here will help make this publication a more effective vehicle for the interchange of ideas among our readership.

Longer articles, of course, are always wanted. Two themes needing to be developed are that of reading (mentioned above) and the question of how to teach English to the non-literate migrant.

Our circulation now includes the child migrant area, as well as full-time and Continuation Class teachers, and contributions from these particular groups of teachers will be very welcome. Suggestions for themes you would like to see developed in the pages of the "TEFL/TESL Newsletter" will also be gratefully received.

SPECIFIC READING SKILLS FOR SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY E.S.L. LEARNERS

*Pamela M. Riley

Reading in any language is a multi-faceted activity involving a variety of integrated skills. Students of English as a second language who are competent readers in their mother tongue should be able to transfer their decoding skills to the new language - but that presupposes that they are competent readers of their mother tongue, that is, that they can weigh up the elements in a clause/sentence/unit/passage, organise them in their proper relationship, select appropriate connotations and derive the meaning the author intended. This meaning can then be assessed critically against the reader's previous knowledge and experience. For reading is thinking, both gaining full and accurate meaning from the printed symbols, and reacting intelligently and critically to this, whatever form or style the writing or message may take.

While reading is a complex process and the skills and sub-skills are interrelated, some can be isolated and specific material presented to help students acquire these skills. This is particularly important if the student's reading in the mother tongue has been confined to fiction or light reading, so he has had little chance of developing the study skills needed for continuing education. It is equally applicable to native speakers of English who may not have acquired the skills necessary for active thoughtful purposeful reading.

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* Pamela Riley is a lecturer in the TEFL program at the University of Sydney.

Some of these skills are the ability to select the main idea from a passage or paragraph, to understand a principle, to follow a sequence of events or directions, or a line of reasoning or argument. Others are selecting relevant details to support the main idea, and recognising irrelevancies, contradictions and non-sequiturs. Active thoughtful readers should be able to see the relationship of ideas in a passage, which in English depends heavily on logical connectors and sequence signals, and recognise and follow the organisation of the writer's plan, noting what is reinforcing, explaining, refuting, illustrating, expanding, summarising etc. which information. They should be able to recognise cause and effect, draw conclusions from facts and experiences, make generalisations and apply principles to particular instances. All these skills involve thinking, all are relevant to intelligent reading, and all can be practised in short exercises and then transferred into longer passages.

Some of these skills are illustrated by practice material which has been used by secondary and post-secondary E.S.L. students in develcping that reading proficiency.

Selecting the main idea

Exercises could be graded in difficulty, starting with paragraphs in which the main idea is expressed in one sentence in different positions in the paragraph. Students may be asked to underline this main idea, write it out in one word or a phrase, or rewrite the sentence with the main idea in their own words.

> e.g. I(i) The boomerang is a fascinating weapon. Australian aboriginals used boomerangs as weapons of war as well as for hunting. Thrown by an expert, a boomerang will return to the exact spot it was thrown from. Boomerangs can be thrown as fast as fifty miles an hour. In appearance a boomerang looks rather like a jet aircraft.

I(ii) As soon as any land is raised above the sea many different things can happen to it. Moving ice may break off or take away rocks and soil. The wind may wear away land, and carry small particles of material to drop in new places. Running water may carry away some loose materials, or leave others behind. These forces will continue to change the surface of the earth.

This can be developed to paragraphs where the main idea is not stated as such, and the students can at first select the main idea from given alternatives I(iii), and later add it for themselves I(iv).

e.g. I(iii) Some people think thirteen is an unlucky number, and will not stay in a room numbered 13. Others believe that if you break a mirror you will have years of bad luck. Spilling salt is meant to bring tears and sorrow, and spilling sugar to bring happiness and joy. Some think black cats are lucky, and that walking underneath ladders will bring bad luck. These superstitions are not based on fact, but have been believed in some parts of the world for many years.

Select the main idea from:

1. Superstitions are founded on fact.

2. Not all superstitions are founded on fact.

3. No superstitions are founded on fact.

4. Superstitions have been believed for some years.

I(iv) In some of the coastal areas houses are built on wooden piles over a lagoon. In other places they are built on platforms in the trees, supported by the lopped branches. Others are on the ground, on supporting piles or directly on the ground, which forms the floor of the house. Building materials vary as much as styles of houses, but the foundation piles are often made from palm trunks, the walls from bamboos, the thatching from palm fronds or bundles of grass, and the flooring from palm planks.

The main idea is .....

.....

Still later the main idea may be expressed in two paragraphs, and the reader reads both and writes it out.

> I(v) After World War II the facts of nuclear energy became public knowledge. Immediately there were predictions that the new energy would be readily available and would have a wide variety of practical uses, such as the heating of dwellings, and for transportation. The energy-needs of the world would be provided, and we would all be better off.
>
> However, atomic energy is expensive to produce; both in terms of raw material and equipment and in terms of manpower. Also, there is danger of reactor accident or sabotage, and the problems of disposal of radioactive wastes. Consequently its use seems to be in operations where great amounts of energy are required, such as running major industries and lighting cities or large areas.
>
> The main idea is .....
>
> .....

The main idea may be not stated, but simply exemplified, e.g.

> I(vi) We discover that the President of the United States doesn't make a choice or decision - he "exercises his options". He doesn't send a message to the Russians: he "initiates a dialogue", and "hopefully" it's a "meaningful dialogue". People don't try new things, they "introduce innovations". They don't talk things over, they "consult their colleagues". They don't ask to be given the tools, they "request that the relevant equipment be supplied". They don't get things done, they "aim to accomplish their objectives".
>
> The main idea is .....
>
> .....

The last can be used enjoyably and successfully in class, students choosing a topic sentence like I(vi) above (difficult involved language is often used instead of simpler direct language) and writing a paragraph illustrating or exemplifying it, and then presenting their

paragraph without the topic sentence or main idea for the others to guess.

Forming conclusions

Examples of exercises to help students form conclusions are given below. In each case the readers are asked to read the selection carefully, and write in a conclusion.

II(i) If an artist paints a picture, and another artist repeats the same picture, the first is called an original, the second is called a copy. In an office, a reproduction of a document by photocopying is called a copy. A typist uses carbon paper when typing letters so she has one original letter and at least one copy.

From this you could conclude that a copy is .....

.....

II(ii) Use yourself as a guinea pig and actually check up on the number of instances when your behaviour follows a pattern established by habit. Very few of your decisions are determined by reasoning. Most are determined by habit.

Clasp your hands together, interlocking the fingers, with one thumb on top of the other. Note which thumb is on top, the right or the left. Now unclasp your hands and clasp them again. Which thumb is on top? It is the same as before. Unclasp your hands and reclasp them with the other thumb on top. It feels strange, doesn't it?

From this simple demonstration you can conclude that .....

.....

II(iii) Psychologists have often argued as to whether you learn a thing better in one sitting, or if it is better to spread the learning over a few days. In one experiment two similar groups of subjects were set to memorise the same material. The first group read through the material sixteen times in one day. The second group also read through the material sixteen times, but once a day for sixteen days. Each group was tested a fortnight after their learning was completed to see

how much was retained. The first group remembered 9% of the material. The second group remembered 79%, despite the fact that there was so much opportunity to forget during the 16 day period of learning.

From this one could conclude that .....

.....

II(iv) "Factory farming" is the term used for keeping animals in cages in factories under artificial conditions so that they will produce more food, that is, lay more eggs, or grow and fatten more quickly. Cruelty is not mentioned - only whether the conditions under which the animal is kept bring profit to the owner. If the animal grows and fattens, or the hen lays eggs, this is profit - and whether the animal has exercise or fresh air and sunlight is of no importance. To keep the animals healthy they are given antibodies and other drugs in their feed. To help them grow they are given stimulants.

From this extract, what do you think the writer's opinion of factory farming is? .....

.....

Students would not be subjected to several lessons or even one lesson, just practising these skills, but certain skills would be introduced for short intensive reading practice sessions and then the specific skill which had been practised would be used in a longer extract, such as a book being read, or a newspaper article. The skill would be practised frequently until it becomes almost a habit for the reader. A variety of materials would be used to reinforce the fact that we read with different purposes in mind, and that these purposes govern how as well as why we read. Only then will students reading in first or second languages be reading thoughtfully and critically.

THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SCENE

*Thelma Grant

Intensive and Accelerated Courses

One facet of the Migrant English program offered free of charge by the Commonwealth Government is the Full-Time Courses. In common with the other aspects of the facility (part-time day and evening classes, and correspondence courses), these are operated on behalf of Canberra by the State Education Departments (in the case of W.A., through the Technical Education Division, by whom we are all employed).

Many of our day and night class teachers have shown particular interest in these courses, whilst others seem to have completely the wrong idea about them. In order to make the situation quite clear, we have decided to explain just what is entailed in these courses.

Migrants who gain a place on one of these courses are paid a weekly allowance; and since we have a responsibility to the taxpayer, whose money they are receiving, we expect and demand a high standard of attendance and concentration on the part of the students during the whole period of their participation.

The Intensive Course runs from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day from Monday to Friday for eight weeks, with an hour for lunch and various small breaks during the day. The Accelerated Course takes things a little more easily: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day for ten weeks, with a lunch break and several short breaks of five or ten minutes each.

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* Thelma Grant is Teacher-in-Charge of Full-Time courses at the Migrant Education Centre in Perth.

When the Full-Time Course concept was first implemented in Western Australia in September 1970, there was just one option - the Intensive Course, lasting eight weeks and designed specifically to help professional and semi-professional migrants, both male and female, who were precluded by their lack of English from obtaining suitable employment in their own particular field.

By March 1973 the Department of Education sanctioned the introduction of the Accelerated Course - doing much the same thing as the Intensive Course but spread over ten weeks instead of eight and catering for migrants with perhaps a lower educational, intellectual or linguistic level who nevertheless would benefit and be of greater value to the work-force and the community if they achieved a reasonable competence in English in a fairly short time.

So the INTENSIVE Course is for students with a better knowledge of English, and the ACCELERATED Course for those with only a very limited knowledge of the language. However it must be understood that, of the five Intensive Courses we run in a period of a year, each one might be of a different level; and the four Accelerated Courses vary in the same way. A new program is prepared to suit the standard and needs of the students in each course.

For example, in one Intensive class we might complete Situational English Book 1 in the first two days, Book 2 in a week and Book 3 during the next fortnight - three and a half weeks in all. Another Intensive class might take six weeks to complete the three books; but this depends entirely on the standard of the class and the students' ability to learn.

When we have finished the three Situational English books we go on to other books and cover comprehension, advanced structures, vocabulary extension, essays, letters and so on. Once again the lesson-content depends on the needs and abilities of the students.

Throughout the course we give dictations, pronunciation lessons and language laboratory sessions. Right from the beginning the class is divided into two groups for parts of the day so that special help may be given as required.

During the last three to four weeks of the Intensive Course, two hours every afternoon are devoted to discussion, with the students divided into small groups of six or seven. Non-teaching discussion group leaders are introduced whenever possible - for instance a Health Education Council instructor, or perhaps a man with a typical Australian accent to start the group thinking and talking about such diverse topics as surf rescue, buying a second-hand car, State and local government etc., always with the three-fold object of (a) getting the students to talk; (b) increasing and widening their knowledge of the nation, the State and the metropolitan area; and (c) accustoming them to different types of voices - all speaking the same language but in widely varying ways.

In an Accelerated Course the pace is much slower. Books 1 and 2 are taught slowly and thoroughly, and we progress at a rate to suit the students; no two classes are ever the same in speed or standard. What we do from Book 3 onwards depends entirely on the level of the class, but apart from the Situational English books additional material is used daily to complement what has been taught and to give extra drilling and practice. Dictation, pronunciation lessons, written work and language laboratory sessions are also an important part of the Accelerated Course.

During the final four to five weeks of the Course one hour a day is used for free discussion. For three of the six hours a day the Accelerated class is divided into three carefully selected groups so that additional supplementary work can be given at the level of each group.

Migrants wishing to attend a Full-Time Course in Perth should obtain an application form either from us or from the Department of Education in Lombard House, Adelaide Terrace; from the Good Neighbour Council; from any Migrant Information office; or from their teacher. The application should be returned as soon as possible after making the decision because there is a long waiting list.

Some people are put off by the application form with its questions about tertiary education etc., but this naturally does not apply to everyone, and to have had an extensive educational background is most certainly not necessary. Many students who have benefited greatly from the Accelerated Courses have had nothing more than a few years at primary school in their own country. The courses are geared to suit all levels and backgrounds.

When the application form is received, potential students are asked to come to the Migrant Education Centre in Wapet House for an interview and to discuss the course. During this interview they are asked to read and write a few sentences. From this and from the discussion we are able to ascertain whether the students will be helped more by an Intensive or by an Accelerated Course. In cases where they need a little more basic help in English before doing a full-time course they are advised to attend Day or Night classes (depending on their circumstances) and to do the Correspondence Course. This is arranged at the time of the interview. It is always emphasised that while students are waiting for a Full-Time Course as much English as possible should be learnt, as this will be a tremendous help once

they start a course. Where students are already attending classes, they are advised to continue and if possible to attend an additional class. If they are not attending any classes, this is then arranged.

In some cases where the students have no knowledge of English or very little, they are asked to return for a second interview a few months later to see if they have improved sufficiently (assuming they have been attending day or night classes) to be ready for an Accelerated Course. Quite a large percentage of some part-time classes are made up of students who have been advised to attend while waiting for a Full-Time Course.

As mentioned before, the Courses vary widely and we go to great lengths to try to put people of fairly equal standard in one class. Also, since twenty is the optimum number for either an Intensive or an Accelerated Course, some people have to wait longer than others; but is to their advantage, as it would be frustrating and a waste of valuable time to put a student with a good basic knowledge of English into a low-level Intensive class; and equally unsuitable to place a student who has practically no knowledge of English into a fairly high level Accelerated class. Our main aim is to give each student as much help as possible and this is done by very careful selection jointly by Migrant Education and the Commonwealth Department of Education, which also runs assessment tests every few weeks for applicants, in order to measure their standard of English from a different angle than that of the interview.

After completing a course the students are strongly encouraged to return to Day or Night classes that suit their new level of English, so there is a continual turnover. It is arranged for new applicants to attend the lower level part-time classes, depending on their standard of English; and then after the course to attend the higher level part-time classes to continue learning and extend what they have learnt on the Full-Time Course.

The Part-Time Accelerated Course

In November 1976, we mounted a Part-Time Accelerated Course in Fremantle. It was purely experimental but it turned out to be a great success. It was held in Fremantle because at that time a lot of applicants in the area were waiting for a Full-Time Course, but because of their poor educational background they were not up to the level of English where they would benefit from a Full-Time Course. The Course lasted five weeks with the students working on very basic English from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every day.

We nicknamed the Course "Weeder-Feeder" as that is exactly what it did. It weeded out those who would not possibly have been able to keep up to the standard or the speed of a Full-Time Course. At the end of the Part-Time Course, they had reached a plateau where they were satisfied and returned happily to the slower pace of their Day Classes. The "feeder" part came in when we found that the rest of the students had progressed to a stage where they were ready to take full advantage of a Full-Time Course, and also were able to keep up in the Day classes where they were formerly floundering.

We held the second Part-Time Accelerated Course in Fremantle early in 1977, with the same good results, so by May we were able to run a Full-Time Accelerated Course there to help people who would not have been able to travel to Perth. This killed two birds with one stone as by that time we realised that people in other areas needed a Part-Time Accelerated Course but as we are so short of accommodation at Wapet House, it had previously been impossible. During the ten weeks that the Full-Time Accelerated Course was being held in Fremantle, we had two 5-week Part-Time Courses here in Perth, using the temporarily-vacated classroom.

Apart from the shortage of accommodation at the Centre, we have the problem of the enormous backlog of applicants waiting for Full-Time Courses. There are approximately 140 people waiting now and the applications keeping pouring in. The Part-Time Accelerated Course offers these applicants almost immediate, semi-concentrated help with their English whereas otherwise they would have to wait for anything up to nine months now before being placed in a Full-Time Course.

Another facet of the Part-Time Accelerated Course is that it provides a progressive, daily course within the time that suits students who find it impossible to spare the required hours every day on a Full-Time Course. Also, the five-week duration of the Part-Time Course is ideal for those who can get only a few weeks off work, or for women who cannot find anyone to look after their children for the duration of a Full-Time Course. There are others who, for health reasons, find a Full-Time Course too much for them, and the same applies to shift workers. These are but a few of the situations encountered for which the Part-Time Accelerated Course finds a solution.

Unless we are able to find some free temporary accommodation outside our own premises these valuable courses must discontinue, owing to the lack of classroom space at the Centre.

Further information about these courses can be obtained by contacting Mrs T. Grant at the Migrant Education Centre, Perth - tel. 250521, Ext. 275.

TESTING IN THE E.S.L. CLASSROOM

Language Teaching Branch, Department of Education, Canberra.

This article examines English testing from the point of view of the E.S.L. classroom teacher. A distinction has been made between informal, teacher-made classroom tests and large-scale, standardised, formal tests. This article concentrates rather more on the former. It is hoped that, furnished with some general information on testing techniques, the teacher may be encouraged to construct his own tests and to use them to their best advantage in the teaching situation.

With the demise of the formal public examination there is a trend in some classrooms to treat testing as an unnecessary part of the teaching process. However, there are reasons to support the argument that testing is an integral part of the teaching process and, if used properly, can benefit both the student and the teacher.

A well-constructed and properly administered test can reinforce the student's learning processes. Provided results are given to the student soon after testing, feedback of performance and reinforcement (in the form of test results), whether positive or negative, can influence what the student learns. From the point of view of motivation, it should be remembered that a test should not be too difficult for the average student and items should not be designed to trick or mislead, as these tactics will tend to discourage rather than motivate students. In addition, testing may improve the learning situation by allowing a student to evaluate his own progress - that is to say that if the student is made aware of his own weaknesses he may be in a better position to take corrective action. Testing can also have the effect of improving a student's motivation during a course - the student may become more willing to learn if there is the likelihood of reinforcement along the way.

There are also many advantages for the teacher. When a test is administered to new students the results can indicate the general level of proficiency of a class and the initial level at which a teaching program should aim. By analysing specific areas of proficiency, a teacher can diagnose particular strengths and weaknesses of the class as a whole and of individual students, too. In this way the teacher can concentrate his teaching on the greatest areas of need and aim his teaching not only at the "average student" but at those students at either end of the proficiency scale.

Tests can be used to measure the progress students make during each stage of a teaching program and to diagnose specific problems students may encounter along the way. They can also be used to help evaluate the success (or otherwise) of the teaching program as a whole, or of particular areas of a syllabus. Specific problems that are diagnosed by a test may indicate important areas that were perhaps "glossed over", or at least not emphasised sufficiently. A test at the end of a teaching program can indicate the extent to which the student has mastered what has been taught.

For the sake of convenience, we will group English tests into three broad categories: achievement, proficiency and aptitude tests.

Achievement tests indicate the extent to which a student has mastered what he has been taught in a specific course or instructional program. Class progress tests fall into this category. Such tests usually follow the objectives and content of a particular course of instruction and may or may not be diagnostic in nature. Diagnostic tests attempt to identify particular areas of strength and weakness so that appropriate remedial action can be taken.

Proficiency tests measure a student's general capabilities at the time of testing. They look at the student's present control of the language with a view to future performance (e.g. "Student has adequate English to commence with the advanced English class"). These tests may or may not be of a diagnostic nature.

Aptitude tests attempt to measure a student's potential for learning - a student's probable likelihood of success in mastering a foreign language, for instance. Such tests are still in a developmental stage and this article will not be concerned with aptitude testing specifically.

Having established that English testing can play an important role in the teaching process, we must now decide exactly what it is we want to measure.

It is easy enough (in theory at least) to separate language into the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Then there are the elements of the language - phonology, morphology and syntax, as well as the rate or general fluency with which the skills are performed. The table below may help illustrate this point:

The 4 skills	Elements of Language			
	Pronunciation/ Spelling	Structure	Vocabulary	Rate and General Fluency
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				
	Discrete-point Tests			Integrative Tests

Figure 1.

Over the years testing has closely reflected current theories of language and the teaching techniques that resulted from these theories. In the 1960's discrete-point testing was very popular. This technique was based on the thinking of structural linguists. They claimed that what constitutes knowledge of a language can be defined by a structural analysis of the target language. The basic assumption underlying the discrete-point testing technique is that there are a number of specific skills, the knowledge of which constitutes "knowing" a language and that these can be identified at the different levels of phonology, morphology and syntax.

In the early 70's this approach to testing came under attack on a number of counts. It was claimed to be impossible to identify precisely many of the complex variables which were used to define the competence of a speaker or listener in the act of communication. It was argued that there exists a fundamental integrative skill that is not measured by a group of independent test items, and that, at best, all that discrete-point tests measure is the "surface" behaviour - they give us no information about what is "underneath". Integrative testing techniques, using cloze procedure and dictation, became popular and were said to test those variables "underneath" which constituted the bulk of language competence. A strong supporter of integrative testing is J.W. Oller, who claims that integrative tests, unlike discrete-point tests, "require activities that are similar in obvious ways to the normal use of language for communicative purposes". (Oller 1973). Oller includes dictation, cloze procedure, composition, the oral interview and some tests of reading and listening comprehension in this category.

Figure 1 can be used to illustrate the distinction between discrete-point and integrative testing. Generally speaking, concentration on the first three components (phonology,

structure and vocabulary) will result in discrete-point tests, while concentration on rate and general fluency will lead to integrative skills testing.

During what J.A. Upshur terms "The Skeptical Seventies", the arguments put forward so enthusiastically by the integrative testers have themselves been challenged - "these arguments have lost much of their force and venom. There has come a realisation that no single theory or method is applicable in all circumstances where testing is called for .... The language-teaching profession is now pretty well agreed that there is no single best way of testing. In fact, there are probably too few good ways." (Upshur 1974).

It is reasonable to conclude that a combination of all kinds of tests, regardless of the label theorists may place on them, will provide the most comprehensive picture of a student's English ability. If the teacher is familiar with a variety of testing techniques he will then be in a position to choose the most suitable techniques for his particular needs.

Important considerations when constructing and evaluating any test are its validity, its reliability, its practicality and its place on the subjectivity/objectivity continuum.

Validity

The most important question to be asked about any testing procedure is whether it measures what it is intended to measure, all of what it is intended to measure, and only what it is intended to measure. If it does, it can be said to be valid. However, validity is not something that is self-evident - it must be established on the basis of adequate evidence. Some of the different approaches to validation such as empirical, content and face validity are described by Harris (1969 pp. 18-21).

Reliability

The second question that should be asked is how accurately and consistently the test measures whatever it does measure. Here we are not concerned with what is measured but rather with the precision of the score and how accurately it can be reproduced on subsequent measurements. Reliability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for test validity and quality. A test yielding highly reliable scores may be measuring something irrelevant or trivial with great precision. On the other hand, a test yielding unreliable scores is not measuring anything very precisely.

Reliability of the test itself depends to a large extent on the adequacy of the sampling of the skill we are trying to measure. This is one reason why objective multiple-choice tests tend to be fairly reliable - a large number of test items can be included in the one test. Standardised administration of a test does tend to improve reliability. Other variables which are harder to control but which also affect reliability include such things as the motivation of the student, illness, day-to-day fluctuations in student performance, special problems during administration, and so on.

The reliability of scoring can either refer to the consistency between different scorers assessing the same performance (inter-rater reliability), or the consistency between one scorer's assessment of the same performance on different occasions (intra-rater reliability).

Practicality

While validity and reliability are important, practicality is also a very necessary consideration. This covers such things as economy of costs, economy of time, ease of administration and scoring, and interpretation of results. The one-to-one interview, for example, under some circum-

stances, may be regarded as not very practical because of several of these factors. The interview is looked at in more detail below.

Subjectivity and objectivity are terms which refer to how a test is scored. All tests fall somewhere along a subjectivity/objectivity continuum.

An objective test usually has only one correct answer for each item and can be scored mechanically. Eysenck's definition is: "A test is objectively scored when any competent observer can be expected to arrive at approximately the same numerical result." (Eysenck 1972)

On the other hand, when a test is subjectively scored (for example, an essay) we would not expect different markers, or even the same marker on different occasions, to arrive at the same results all the time or even most of the time, in other words, they are less reliable. This is because there are usually many ways of responding, often with varying degrees of acceptability. Each scorer's own value judgements (and biases) as to what is right or wrong, good or bad, are introduced into the assessment procedure along with possibly some irrelevant factors (for instance, the tendency to assess personality in an interview measuring oral proficiency).

Over the next few pages, some of the different testing techniques which the teacher may find useful at various stages of the teaching program will be discussed. It is not intended to cover all aspects of these techniques - more detailed information can be obtained from the references in the bibliography to this article.

Dictation

The discrete-point theorists have largely been inclined to reject dictation as a testing device. Harris (1969 p.5) for instance, claims that it is "uneconomical and imprecise",

while Lado (1961 p.34) argues that dictation "appears to measure very little of language." He claims that word-order and vocabulary are given and therefore are not tested, aural perception is not tested as the words can be identified by context, and the slow presentation makes identification easier anyway.

The integrative testers disagree. Oller (1971) argues that the listener must still discover word-order for himself - to support his claim he points to common errors of word-order inversions that students make during dictation. The student is given a sequence of sounds from which an intended set of words in sequence must be extracted. The student is not just copying down words, but is involved in an active and complex process of analysis-by-synthesis. "Grammar expectancy" is said to play an important role - this is the process of anticipating the next phrase and judging what you ought to be writing from what has gone before. Dictation is said to test a wide range of integrative skills such as listening comprehension, auditory memory span, spelling, the recognition of sound segments and a familiarity with the grammatical and lexical patterning of the language.

Dictation also has the advantage of being easy to prepare. The level of the students should be kept in mind when selecting suitable passages.

Ways of administering dictation vary, although one fairly well established procedure recommended by Oller (1972 a) is as follows:

1. The passage is read through at normal conversational speed.

2. The passage is then read a second time with pauses at convenient phrase/clause boundaries to allow students to write down what they hear. Punctuation is given.

3. The passage is then read a third time at normal speed with occasional pauses to allow students to make corrections.

It is generally agreed that for dictation to be effective as an integrative test it must be administered at sufficient speed to challenge the short term memory limitations of the non-native speaker. As Oller (1972 a) states: "Reading a dictation at a snail's pace is probably not much of a test of anything but spelling."

One effective method of scoring is that proposed by Irvine et al (1974) who score dictation by counting the number of correct words appearing in the original sequence. Spelling is ignored as long as words are "recognisable" and do not break any phonological rules (e.g. "comunity" would be correct but "proplem" would not.) Whatever method is used to score dictation it is usually fairly time-consuming and to some degree subjective. (What is "recognisable"? What is "in sequence"?) Subjectivity can be decreased somewhat by insisting on correct spelling.

As well as providing a valuable measure of global language proficiency, dictation can also be used as a diagnostic device - this can be done by analysing the types of errors made by students. A dictation passage could, for instance, be used to test a student's ability to deal with specific grammatical structures by constructing a passage so that it contains those structures that are of interest.

Cloze Procedure

The word "cloze" comes from "closure", a term from Gestalt psychology, which describes the human tendency to complete a familiar but not-quite-finished pattern.

A cloze test is constructed by deleting every nth word (usually every 5th, 6th, 7th or 8th) from a passage of prose. The student is then asked to replace the missing words. The first couple of sentences are usually left intact to provide the reader with some lead-in context, and the length of the passage is normally such that 40 to 50 words can be deleted. This should provide a fairly representative sample of the language.

As with dictation, Oller uses the idea of "grammar expectancy" to explain the theory behind the cloze test. He claims that "the foundation of all language skills is the capacity to anticipate elements in sequence." (Oller 1972 b) Oller argues that this expectancy underlies all language skills and that the cloze test is capable of measuring this expectancy and therefore general language competence.

The cloze test has the added advantages of being both easy to prepare and easy to administer. A cloze passage should be selected according to the level of language the students will be expected to deal with, although Oller points out that passages thought to be below the level expected of the students on a conventional reading test, for instance, work well with the cloze procedure.

Another point in favour of the cloze test is that the student must actively produce rather than simply recognise the correct answer. (It is noteworthy that a common criticism of multiple-choice tests is that they test only passive recognition skills.) The cloze test can also be used as a diagnostic device if the marker is prepared to spend time analysing the errors made by students.

Cloze tests can be marked using either the "exact" or "acceptable" scoring methods. With the "exact" method only the actual word which was deleted from the original passage

is marked correct, while with the "acceptable" method not only is the actual word deleted marked correct but any word that would be "acceptable in the context". Research is inconclusive as to which method is more successful with non-native speakers; however, the ease of marking and the less subjective nature of the "exact" method are distinct advantages.

Modifications to the typical cloze procedure may also be useful for teaching purposes. For example, the teacher may wish to experiment with selective deletions (deleting specific item types such as prepositions) or using multiple-choice items instead of blank spaces.

Essay Writing

As a testing device the essay has the advantage of giving the student an opportunity to demonstrate his ability to organise his ideas using his own words. As well as helping to motivate the student to improve his writing skills, the essay is reasonably easy to prepare and administer, an important consideration for the classroom teacher.

However, the essay also has its share of disadvantages. It is a notoriously unreliable testing instrument. Individual performance tends to vary significantly over time; depending, for instance, on a student's liking for a particular topic. From the point of view of scoring, the essay is extremely subjective and therefore unreliable, and in addition is a very time-consuming process. It should also be remembered that a "cunning" student can often disguise his weaknesses by avoiding difficult constructions.

Research has shown that reliability can be improved by obtaining a number of samples of writing for each student

and then having each of these samples assessed by two or more experienced examiners. This ideal arrangement will, however, usually be impracticable in the classroom situation.

There are different ideas on how an essay should be marked. One approach is the impression method where the scorer gives a single mark based on his overall impression of the merits of the essay. Another approach is the analytic one where the marker separates out various features of the writing skill (content, form, style, grammar, fluency, etc.) and assesses each area separately, usually with some kind of rating scale. Research does not indicate that any one method is superior to any other - all require subjective judgments. Whatever method is used, the marker should be clear from the outset as to how he intends marking the essay and exactly what he intends looking for in the essay.

Careful consideration should of course be given to the choice of topics. Where possible, meaningful topics should be chosen with a clearly defined problem which motivates the student to write. As Heaton (1975 p.128) points out: "How often in real-life situations does a person begin to write when he has nothing to write, no purpose in writing and no audience in mind?" "A pleasant evening", "My best friend", or "Look before you leap" fall into this category. It may be necessary to give specific directions as to what points the composition should cover as Harris (1969 p.78) does with his "guided essay":

> "Describe an interesting member of your family: one of your parents or grandparents, a brother or sister, cousin, aunt, or uncle. Be specific in describing the special characteristics that you think make him or her an interesting person. You may wish to give examples of things this person has said or done which illustrate these characteristics."

The "situational essay" provides the student with a specific situation and context in which he must write, and in this way can determine the register and style of the essay as well as its content. This approach is a variation on the "guided essay" and also allows for easier comparison between student performances. For example, the student may be given directions to reply to a letter in a certain tone, answering the questions raised in the letter and making certain points. Other variations on this approach may include describing pictures, maps, or even composing an essay from information contained in a table of statistics.

Although "guided essay" and "situational essay" topics may take extra time and effort to prepare, they are likely to provide a more interesting task for the student and result in a better sample of the student's writing ability as well as allowing for more meaningful comparison between students.

The Oral Interview

Just as the essay attempts to give the teacher a sample of a student's writing skills, so the interview attempts to sample and assess the student's oral skills.

The interview is a "free-response" type situation where the examiner must provide cues to the student during the exchange. This will involve a certain amount of preparation in the form of standard questions to ask each student. The interviewer should decide in advance on such things as the length of the interview, the speed at which he will talk, the questions he will ask or at least the level of difficulty of the questions. This standardisation of the interview is important as it will improve reliability and allow for more meaningful comparison between students. It should be remembered, however, that some degree of

flexibility within the structure of the interview is necessary and (especially in the classroom situation) the less formal the interview, the better.

The interview is often criticised as being an unrealistic, somewhat artificial communication situation. Like the essay, it is also a notoriously unreliable measure. No two interviews are conducted in exactly the same way, no matter how structured they are, and there will always be inevitable shifts of standards by assessors when a number of students are interviewed. Interview assessment is a very subjective procedure and, like the essay, can be carried out by using the impression or analytic methods. Whichever method is used, it is helpful to have predetermined assessment criteria. One way of doing this is to construct short, concise and mutually exclusive behavioural statements for each point on a rating scale. If, for instance, the analytic method is used, a rating scale for pronunciation and intonation similar to that shown below could be used:

Pronunciation	3	Sounds like a native speaker
and	2	Acceptable, but with some errors and noticeable accent
Intonation	1	Very foreign, almost unintelligible

This technique may help reduce subjectivity and standardise assessment procedures, which will in turn improve reliability. Also, it is advisable for the actual scoring of interview performance to be left until after the interview has been completed.

Another way of improving the reliability of the interview assessment is to record performance on tape and arrange for two or more experienced markers to make their assessments independently at a later date, having first agreed on what

to look for and how to assess it. Although this procedure should produce more reliable results, it is a time-consuming one which would usually not be feasible in the classroom situation.

Despite some obvious disadvantages, the interview does at least have a certain amount of "face-validity", in that it appears as if it would be a good way of assessing oral proficiency. There is also a strong tendency for interviewers to be confident of their own ability to assess performance accurately (despite research findings to the contrary).

It would appear that as yet no way has been discovered of scoring the interview in an objective way. In addition, the interview tends to be very time-consuming. However, despite its faults, it has many supporters who claim that there is no better way of assessing oral proficiency.

Two common testing techniques are the use of multiple-choice items and short-answer items:

The multiple-choice test item traditionally consists of a stem, which is either a question or an incomplete statement, and two or more choices, one of which is the correct answer, the other choices being the distracters. The usual number of choices is 4 or 5 - any less than this and chance plays too big a part in a student's score, while it is extremely difficult with most test items to find more than 5 good choices.

Because of their highly structured nature, multiple-choice items can "home in" on specific skills and elements of language that need to be measured and which the "cunning" student might avoid in other types of tests. They can provide valuable diagnostic information about a student's progress during a teaching program. Because multiple-choice

items can usually be answered rapidly, large numbers can be included in the one test, and this tends to improve reliability. Since there is only one correct answer to each item, marking is a mechanical process which is extremely quick and objective. Reliability therefore tends to be fairly high.

Multiple-choice items also have their drawbacks. The student does not have to produce his own answer, he is "simply" asked to recognise which is correct. It is often claimed that success with this type of item is related to test-taking strategies and practice, while it is undoubtedly true that the preparation of multiple-choice tests requires a lot of skill and is very time-consuming.

The short-answer test item has most of the advantages of the multiple-choice items, the main difference being that short-answer items require the candidate to actively produce his own answers rather than just recognise the correct answer. The student is usually required either to complete a sentence or to compose one according to specific directions, although there are variations on this general pattern.

For example: Directions: Complete the following:

Written: "Please help me. I don't know what .....
Should I call the Police?"

Short-answer items are usually quick and easy to prepare. However they take longer to score than multiple-choice items and often there is more than one correct answer, as in the above example. This introduces an element of subjectivity into the scoring procedure.

READING COMPREHENSION TESTS

Paraphrasing a sentence

With the multiple-choice approach, the student reads a sentence and then chooses from a set of alternative sentences the one which best expresses the meaning of the first sentence.

With the short-answer approach, the student reads a sentence and then must write in his own words another sentence with the same meaning as the given sentence. This approach will naturally require extra time to score and will measure the student's writing skills as well as reading skills.

Here is an example (Oller 1972 a) of the former approach:

Directions: Choose the sentence which best expresses the meaning of the given sentence.

Written: Sitting on the floor, Janet watched her husband paint the chair.

A. While Janet sat on the floor, her husband watched her.

B. Janet watched her husband paint the chair which was on the floor.

C. Janet sat on the floor watching her husband paint the chair.

D. Janet painted the chair and watched her husband sitting on the floor.

Understanding the main idea in a paragraph

With the multiple-choice approach, the student reads through a given paragraph and then chooses from a number of alternatives the statement which best expresses the central idea in the paragraph.

With the short-answer item, the student reads through the paragraph and then writes one or more sentences (according to the instructions) which express the central idea in the

paragraph. This method of testing can be fairly time-consuming.

Here is an example (Oller 1972 a):-

Directions: Read the paragraph and then choose the statement below that best expresses its central idea.

Written: The obvious method of discovering whether the class has studied its work, and of prodding them on to study in the future, is to ask questions. Written questions with written answers are "tests", "quizzes", or "examinations". Horrible words. My soul sickens at their very sound. I sat through so many of them ... yet I have never been able to think of a substitute, and have yet to meet anyone else who has.

A. Hundreds of examinations have been given in the past.

B. Written questions are the best type of examination.

C. Students must be prodded to answer the questions on a test.

D. Tests are horrible, but no one has found a substitute.

Longer texts with questions

The student reads through the passage and then answers the questions which follow.

The length of the text will vary according to the standard of the students being tested and should also be related to the level of difficulty of the language.

The passage selected must be capable of providing the basis for a sufficient number of multiple-choice comprehension items. It is often difficult to extract enough multiple-choice items - as a rule, passages dealing with a series of events, a collection of facts or a number of different

opinions make good texts for reading comprehension tests, while passages dealing with a single idea or main theme are usually less suitable.

If the test is a class progress/achievement test, the reading passage should be similar to the type of reading material the student will meet during his course work. In fact, a good principle to observe in any test is that of asking for no tasks other than familiar ones to be performed.

To avoid the sometimes difficult process of preparing multiple-choice items it may be decided to use short-answer items or open-ended questions after the reading passage. While this type of item saves time in the preparation stage, it does require more time to score and introduces an element of subjectivity into the assessment. What may not necessarily be a fault with this approach is that it measures the student's writing skills as well as reading skills.

The Cloze test has been treated separately above.

LISTENING COMPREHENSION TESTS

Statements or Questions

The student hears a statement or a question and then chooses between a number of written alternatives the one that either paraphrases the statement or fits the question. For example:

(a) Spoken: "He needed four days to plant 10 kilograms of seed."

Written:
A. 4 men planted 10 kilograms of seed.
B. He planted 10 kilograms of seed in 4 days.
C. 10 men planted 4 kilograms of seed.
D. He planted 4 kilograms of seed in 10 days.

(b) Spoken: "Is it late?"

Written:
A. Yes, it is.
B. Yes, it does.
C. Yes, it was.
D. Yes, it did.

Distracters should be natural responses that a listener who may have misunderstood what he heard would be likely to make.

Dialogues

The student hears a short conversation between two people and then a question is asked by a third person. The student then chooses between written multiple-choice answers. It is important that the language is realistic, informal and of a conversational type. This approach to testing listening comprehension is a more realistic communication situation than the statement/question item described above. Here is an example:

Spoken:
Voice A: "Where are you going, Miss Smith?"
Voice B: "I'm going to a lecture on the history of Australia."
Voice C: "Where was Miss Smith going?"

Written:
A. To the Library.
B. To a history lecture.
C. To the beach.
D. To a symphony concert.

Lectures

The student listens to a lecture (usually either once or twice) during which time he may take notes. He then answers a series of written multiple-choice questions.

As with the dialogue, the lecture test can be either recorded or "live". Recording the lecture will help to standardise presentation when the test is given on more than one occasion. The lecture should be realistic - as much like informal spoken English as possible - and the content should, as a rule, be general in nature so as not to discriminate in favour of students who may have specific knowledge on a certain topic. The length of the passage will depend on the standard of the students and the difficulty of the passage.

In this type of test note taking is usually encouraged so as to lessen the contribution made by retention skills.

TESTING VOCABULARY

When constructing a vocabulary test there are a number of points to consider. Do we want to concentrate on active or passive vocabulary? Should we take the items from spoken or written language? It is generally the case that the more elementary the level of the test, the greater the number of items from spoken language. The more advanced test will concentrate more on written items.

With an achievement test, selection of vocabulary does not present serious problems. If the student has followed a particular syllabus, words can be selected from that syllabus, from textbooks used during the course, from samples of errors made in written work, etc. With general

proficiency tests, however, or with achievement tests where students have followed different syllabuses, the test constructor may have to go to more general sources such as word frequency lists. It should however be remembered that these word lists are generally based on written language only.

Some of the different techniques for testing vocabulary are described below:

Definition

This item type consists of a test word followed by a number of alternative definitions or synonyms. For example (from Harris 1969 p. 51):

nap

A. a brief sleep
B. a happy song
C. a sharp rock
D. a short meeting

This type of item is easy to prepare and it is possible to test a large number of words fairly quickly. However, many words do not lend themselves easily to short definitions and this type of item is often criticised on the grounds that the words are out of context and the task is an unrealistic one.

Completion

Here the words to be tested are put into the context of sentences. It is necessary to decide just how much context to give the student: too little will establish insufficient meaning within the sentence, while too much context will provide too many clues.

With the multiple-choice item a word is deleted from a sentence and the student chooses, from a number of alternatives, the word that fits the context of the sentence. For example:

Tell me exactly what you mean. Be .....!

A. scanty
B. unique
C. obscure
D. specific

The short-answer item type simply requires the student to fill in the missing word(s) in the sentence. For example:

The child was so ..... that he could not stay awake.

It is obvious that with this type of item, marking time will increase because there will often be a number of possible correct answers.

Paraphrase

With the multiple-choice item a word or words in a sentence are underlined and the student chooses the alternative that means the same as the underlined word(s). For example:

The speaker's monotonous voice continued.

A. boring
B. melodious
C. quiet
D. harsh

With the short-answer approach the student is asked to rewrite the sentence using his own word(s) in place of the underlined word(s).

TESTING GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES

When testing grammar it is first necessary to decide what structures to test and the importance that should be given to each. It is important to cover as broad a range of relevant grammatical structures as possible, taking note of Harris' warning about the tendency to test only "a few structural points that happen to be easiest to put into the test writer's favourite item format." (Harris 1969 p.25) The choice of what to test is of course much easier with achievement tests where the structures taught during a particular course are what should be tested, than with proficiency tests, where the range of choice is very broad.

Below are a number of different item types that can be used to test grammatical structures:

Completion

Where one or more words are missing from a sentence the student must choose between a number of multiple-choice alternative completions. For example:

Please tell ..... now.

A. to him to start
B. him to start
C. to him start
D. for him start

The short-answer item type asks the student to complete the sentence in his own words, without alternatives. For example:

Directions: Complete the sentence using a form of the word or words given in brackets.

Written: When I came into the room she ..... a book. (STILL READ)

In this example the words in brackets help to restrict the range of responses and structures.

Sentence Alternatives

The student must select from a number of alternative sentences the one he thinks is correct or acceptable English. For example:

A. Alexis arrived in Australia ago two years.
B. Alexis arrived in Australia before two years.
C. Alexis arrived in Australia two years ago.

Transformation

The student is required to transform a sentence in a particular way according to the instructions. For example:

Directions: Rewrite the sentence in another way, beginning with the words given.

Written: I haven't written to you for a long time.

It's a long time .....

OR

Directions: Rewrite the following sentence in the negative:

Written: I went to town yesterday.

.....

Error recognition

With this type of item a sentence contains a number of words or phrases underlined and the student selects the underlined word or phrase which is incorrect or unacceptable. For example:

My car would not start so I went to town by the bus.
A B C D

When preparing multiple-choice items it should be remembered that, first, there must be only one correct answer, and secondly, the distracters should distract - implausible or completely inappropriate choices are unlikely to attract any responses and are therefore serving no real purpose.

It is hoped that the information contained in this article may prove useful to teachers of E.S.L. by perhaps opening up new possibilities for testing and by encouraging teachers to try some of the many different testing techniques available to them, all of which have something of value to offer.

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"GEORGE AND NINA": NEW ELEMENTARY LEVEL READER IN PREPARATION

The Language Teaching Branch of the Commonwealth Department of Education is currently producing a collection of short stories, entitled "George and Nina", for students at the elementary level. Light-hearted in tone, the stories have their settings in the familiar, everyday scenes of contemporary, urban living in Australia. Some typical incidents involved in the stories are: shopping for clothes, collecting a parcel in a post office, answering a classified advertisement, following directions in a department store, visiting the doctor, booking a seat on a plane, dialling the emergency number 000, and discussing a job problem on the factory floor.

The central objective of all the stories has been to present an interesting narrative in realistic, simple English and, at the same time, to locate the various incidents in areas of priority social need for migrants.

Other features of "George and Nina" are:

- The text will be accompanied by appropriate illustrations to aid comprehension.
- A large proportion of the narrative is presented in dialogue form, which should render the stories easily adaptable for activities such as role-playing.
- To assist the teacher following a functional approach, a short summary of each story is given in an appendix.
- Comprehension questions are provided at the back of the book.

Selected passages from "George and Nina" will be available on cassette.

COMMISSIONED AND CONTRACT WRITING FOR NATIONAL MATERIALS PROJECTS

The Language Teaching Branch of the Commonwealth Department of Education is exploring the possibility of commissioning work or of arranging writing contracts for materials projects being developed for the teaching of English as a second language.

The projects cover a wide age range from infants to adult level. There is also a wide diversity in the types of materials, which encompass beginning, intermediate and comparatively advanced ESL materials.

The range of work proposed includes the development of reading material, workbook exercises, teacher's notes, suggestions for language learning activities; restructuring/rewriting the content of certain subject areas; preparing material to be recorded or taped; suggestions for teaching aids.

It is important that the author of commissioned or contracted work be prepared to try to write in accordance with the language controls that are appropriate to a required level of difficulty.

Any person interested in writing for national projects is invited to write to:

The Director
Language Teaching Branch
Commonwealth Department of Education
WODEN ACT 2606

It would be useful to forward an original sample of writing, or of material that has been prepared for teaching purposes, if this is possible.

FORUM

(This is a new feature, designed to provide an opportunity for readers to express views, outline techniques found useful, or to comment on ideas on TESL that have been aired in the TEFL/TESL Newsletter or elsewhere - in short, any aspect of TEFL/TESL that lends itself to a brief statement rather than to a full-scale article. The letters appearing in this issue mostly refer to the Victorian Priority English materials, which appeared in Vol. 2, No. 2, Oct. 1976).

THE PRIORITY MATERIALS

Team-Teaching or A.V. Aids Desirable

For over twelve months the Victorian AMEB has been trialling the Priority Course. During this time there have been two priority classes running continuously every day for two hours, for a duration of 4-6 weeks. Both the advantages and the shortcomings of the course have now become more readily apparent.

As a holding class the Priority Course has the advantage of being non-sequential and, generally, students have been able to join the class at any stage without being disadvantaged. A qualification here, apart from the inconvenience to the teacher of a new student to be settled into the class, is the need to teach the Identification segment to the newcomer, especially if he or she is a beginner with English.

As a course for beginners, the Priority Course has been successful in providing a springboard to more formal, structured classes. Although structure is not taught as such, the grammatical patterns tend to be internalised and subsequent exposure to structure becomes easier for most students. This type of course also tends to give the student confidence in his or her ability to learn because it provides language which can be used immediately.

While, on the whole, the results of this trial period seem to be positive and encouraging, there are shortcomings in the course which have now become obvious.

The first of these is the difficulty the teacher faces in presentation and in maintaining consistency in repetition. Team teaching would solve part of this problem, enabling situations and dialogues to be presented in a more realistic manner. However, team teaching is a luxury few centres can afford and a project to produce audio/visual aids which could be used with the course will, hopefully, be started in the near future. The teachers who will be involved in this project have taught the course for some time and their expertise and experience should produce exciting and worthwhile results.

Another difficulty is that teachers find their students sometimes need help with situations which are not included in the material, e.g. banking, accommodation, the Post Office, etc. Although the course was designed to meet only the basic needs of beginners, it is thought by many teachers that a broader approach to priority material would also be of assistance in dealing with the needs of more advanced students.

For this reason, teachers will be invited to submit segments which they have designed for their students, or to request that special segments be designed to meet specific needs. If this idea is acceptable, it would mean that the Priority Course, while still containing the elementary segments for beginners, will be expanded to become a resource book for teachers at all levels.

The case for the inclusion of literacy in a priority program also needs to be considered. The Priority Course was designed to develop oral skills almost exclusively but some teachers using it find the need to include basic literacy as

well. Whether basic literacy segments should be included or not, and whether we should develop a student's workbook are questions which are still open to debate.

- Pam Le Good, A.M.E.B., Vic.

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Cueing with cartoons or symbols found useful

The following comments on the Victoria Priority Materials are based on a brief two weeks (20 hours) experience with a class of about twenty adults.

General:-

1. The social application of survival themes is quickly grasped and appreciated by new migrants.

2. Since the priority class is also a holding class, new entrants must be able to join in whenever they happen to arrive. This works satisfactorily for a while. Unavoidably, revision is a bit of a problem: easy recapitulation for some is a major learning experience for others.

Content of the "Newsletter":-

It is not clear whether the "course" is to be regarded as a prescription or a resource document. The actual amount of material covered in a priority course is small, so the prescription need only be brief. Nevertheless it is valuable for the teacher to have a fund of possible situations and dialogues to draw on. The backgrounds, the needs, and the rate at which students join the class are all variable. A flexible approach is therefore necessary.

A Note on dialogue:-

Native speaker dialogue often compels a desired response by the manipulation of (a) timing; (b) place; (c) intonation; (d) conditional phrases; (e) knowledge of an individual's or institution's biases, etc. Most of this is culture-specific. The migrant is therefore at a loss not only for words, but for knowledge of what the response should be. Even the sequencing of "survival dialogue"' may not be obvious to someone fresh from another culture. For this reason I have found it useful, apart from the normal miming and role play, to cue each piece of dialogue with a small cartoon or symbol, (e.g. = "here you are"). Once the cue is picked up students can concentrate on the main job of formulating language. Fairly extended dialogue can be handled in this way.

- Thorold May, A.M.E.B., Vic.

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<u>As a supplement to progressive structure</u>

The Priority Material is not generally suited to full-time courses except in a modified form for weak accelerated courses where spontaneous discussion is difficult to initiate.

The method of presentation of these essential topics would also be beneficial to the illiterate or semi-literate learner, (whose "survival" needs are as great as - if not greater than - those of literate students). However, vocabulary taught in this instance would have to be greatly simplified and situations would need to be presented by the exclusive use of detailed pictures and <u>oral</u> repetition.

As mentioned in the rationale, this course is particularly valuable for "holding" classes, where they exist, or even for day classes where the material can be successfully adapted to supplement progressive structure. Some of the situations incorporated in the course could also be used to advantage in night classes where working students, especially during the second hour, are often too tired to concentrate on formal structure. In this way "survival" needs and progressive structure would complement each other.

In its present form, the vocabulary and structure employed is rather sophisticated and could perhaps be useful as a follow-up for students who have completed full-time courses and need conversational practice in order to increase vocabulary and general comprehension.

However, in order for this course to be effective it is obvious that situations must be staged as realistically as possible, and this presents certain practical difficulties. For instance, a great deal of preparation would be needed to set up the various situations to gain maximum effect and this would involve a great deal of time which could be more profitably spent in teacher-student contact. Most centres would be faced with difficulty in obtaining the elaborate props suggested for use on the course as well as lack of storage space. We feel that detailed pictures and make-believe situations would serve just as well to provide the student with priority language needs.

- Mrs. T. Grant and Mrs. S. Economou,
Migrant Education Centre, Perth.

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"Bring in the real world outside"

How can some of the frustrations of the non-English speaker be alleviated as quickly as possible in the new environment? It is essential that the immediate needs of the non-English speaker be examined before any course can be seen as relevant. Perhaps the interesting question lies in who has the best appreciation of the non-English speaker's needs? It appears that little time has been given to interviewing migrants and finding out their "priorities". Little contact has been made with outside organizations or groups who come into contact with the non-English speaking newcomer and who therefore have an objective appreciation of some of his new needs. Insufficient energy has been exerted on exploring the actual language that the migrant will be coming into contact with. Consequently the outcome of all this is often an imposition by the teacher on the student of what the teacher feels is necessary. Take for example the newcomer who needs an understanding of directions. The teacher, if he has not explored the language possibilities given by people in the streets, will very neatly but maybe most inconveniently "deck out" the newcomer with a nice, simple but unrealistic kit.

What then is the outcome of this for the language teacher of a "survival course"? It means that language and problems from outside must be brought and examined inside if a "survival course" is to be meaningful. How can this be achieved? It appears that -

1. migrants must be interviewed as to what they consider their immediate needs on their arrival in Australia;

2. the needs of the group at hand should be carefully examined;

3. contact should be made with outside organisations, groups and individuals who are in possible contact with the newcomer;

4. audio-visual materials must be developed to enable the living situation from outside to be brought in. It is unrealistic to expect the teacher to have realistic awareness of the variety of language used in a variety of situations. It is also placing unfair stress on the teacher to expect him to try to construct situations without the aid of audio-visual materials. How can he be interviewer and interviewee, shop assistant and customer, doctor and patient, to name only a few?

This paper suggests then that we step outside to observe, analyse, film, record and enquire.

- G. McIntyre, Teacher of Survival Courses, A.M.E.B., Vic.

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"It gives migrants confidence"

The priority course aims to teach the newcomer to Australia those basic language patterns which enable him to function in our anglo-conformist society.

The thematic content includes situations the migrant faces in his assimilation into our community. Suggested dialogues appropriate to each situation have been produced but the complexity of the beginning student's task to interpret the correct meaning then to elicit the "proper" pronunciation including relative stress, rhythm and intonation has been highly over-simplified.

From the very first day, the course recommends the teaching of a theme - a supposedly very simple, logical initiation to the learning of English. However, two years experience of using this course has illustrated to me that my heterogeneous class needs a phonemic background in the new language before the teacher not only demands difficult consonantal and vowel blends to be reproduced but whole strings of sentences in context. For one who speaks a language derived from the same or a similar alphabet, mimicking a sentence presents little difficulty but for those of a completely different ethnic background, this can become a highly elaborate task. Students tend to produce the sound of their own language which most closely approximates that of English - if there be a similar one. What of the Chinese, Japanese, Thais, Laotians, Cambodians, Vietnamese, Turks and Egyptians, just to mention a few of the national groups now frequenting English classes? To cater for these diverse groups, I believe the teaching of phonetics should receive top priority. This is a factor the priority course fails to consider, as it does the student who does not know how to write the English alphabet.

Yet another shortcoming of the priority course as it exists is the lack of any related "back-up" audio or visual material. Thus it demands a teacher be a good actor or actress playing two roles. For example a teacher might be at the same time an employer and an employee, a doctor and a patient, a shop-assistant and a customer, as the situation demands. This in itself can confus the student who must endeavour to guess "who is who?" and "who is saying what?" Once the dramatics (i.e. the presentation) have finished, the teacher has to assume that all the students have understood his or her little performance. Audio-visual, media-film-strip and cassette, slides and cassette or a scripted video-tape, could be successfully used here to eliminate any misunderstanding in the implications of each situation. Glen McIntyre (M.E.B. - Vic.) and myself have

recently begun producing audio-visual media to complement the priority course slides synchronized with the cassette recorder. We are now waiting on the Innovations Grant Committee for money approval, to allow us to continue with this project.

Not only could this course be improved by the production of audio-visual material but by the adaptation of the content to cater for a more elementary level, that is those students who come to class not only devoid of English, but who are also illiterate or semi-literate in their own language. I believe Pam Le Good (M.E.B. - Vic.) the original Priority Course writer, has been asked to undertake this task.

Despite these necessary implementations, the Priority Course as it exists does achieve its aims of internalising basic language patterns but more importantly it gives the migrant confidence to function in his new community.

- C.R. Lewis, A.M.E.B., Vic.

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"Valuable for intermediate and advanced students"

I am sure many TESL teachers, like myself, have been equipping the second language learner with many of the dialogues set out in Vol.2 No.2 of the "TEFL/TESL Newsletter", and more, but it is interesting to see that something has been compiled at a higher level to assist all teachers with realistic and essential situational material.

The Editorial states that the notes offer constructive suggestions for the "pre-beginner" or "early-beginner". My interpretation of a "pre-beginner", is someone with no prior skills in the language. Thus, to learn parrot fashion, "I want this prescription filled" (one of many complicated

patterns) is of no use, unless the student is in that situation in the near future. Confidence is also required in using such a statement. To understand the meaning of "I want", would take time; the correct pronunciation of "prescription" would be far from easy, and the meaning of "filled" - an Australian expression - would be virtually impossible to explain. Should the request be used, with the correct intonation and stress, what are the chances of the chemist or his assistant answering in a clear voice, "Certainly. It'll be ready in 10 minutes"? Even I would be more likely to hand the piece of paper to the assistant!

I would argue, therefore, that this study, written in order to fulfil motivation and satisfaction with the pre-beginner, is not of tremendous value.

However, I do see valuable material that can assist intermediate and advanced students, in order to find out what we do say when faced with particular situations in our Australian community.

With an intermediate adult group, I have been able to lift the dialogues from the text. Although the students had been able to make themselves understood in the past, they had not been aware of the phraseology that is commonly used. The presented material provided a basic framework from which vocab and type of structures required could be extended to fulfil their needs.

With my group of adult early-beginners, I have found a guided course essential, but in order to give the dreary content an uplift, there are always familiar needs to fit into the new structure, thus giving the student the satisfaction and relevance he needs to promote motivation. For example:

(a) are you <u>an assistant</u>?
(b) I have <u>a cold</u>.

The point made in the introduction, that fluency in specific patterns within a limited functional range enables one to feel more secure in a foreign language situation, prompted me to compare this with a foreign phrase book, written for an Australian overseas. For the Australian to practise phrases, where a facial expression or gesture would do just as well, is great fun, but for the majority of migrants, English isn't such fun. He will have had harrowing experiences, and confidence must be renewed before he can put his newly acquired phrases into use, and be able to feel he can cope with alternative possible responses, without feeling embarrassment.

- Heather Worth,
Migrant Education Dept,
Darwin.

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IS EVALUATION AIMED AT "FAILURE TO LEARN" OR "FAILURE TO TEACH"?

With all the interest in "communicative competence" and "loose pidgin" at the moment it is becoming more difficult for the E.S.L. teacher, in defining his eclectic approach, to maintain an objective consideration of evaluation. For many teachers evaluation presents a hopeless picture - these are the teachers who see each group of students for a mere eight weeks. By the time the students' needs and abilities are assessed completely the course is halfway and frustration increases at the completion of the course because students and teachers alike realise that they have just begun to benefit. It can only be re-stated that the whole question of course duration must be reconsidered in the light of post evaluation. During his recent visit to Melbourne Mr. Roland Hindmarsh spoke of 2,000 hours as the ideal time allotment for optimum E.S.L. learning.

At the Migrant Centres in the various States the student is able to follow a variety of different courses in addition to a subsidised full-time course. I do not wish to discuss the question of subsidised shorter-hour courses or an English-learning voucher system at this stage, but rather to consider the responsibility of teachers at these venues to see evaluation as a total yet specific need.

Frequently, at A.M.E.B., students appear for a considerable period of time, spending two hours a day in classes before or after work.

E.S.L. teachers are in the unique position of not having to meet set standards such as tertiary entrance exams. At the same time they are dealing with groups of people who find it difficult and even impolite to state views that conflict with those of the teacher. This cultural diffidence, coupled with gratitude, can lull the E.S.L. teacher into believing he/she knows what the student needs. Sometimes this certainty that we understand their needs can lead us to equate "being different" with "being a problem", and therefore ineducable: the student, not the system, is at fault; and our solution all too readily can then become "fill the time, but not the mind".

It was stated by one teacher at a seminar recently that he refuses to let his students be classified as second-class citizens by deluding them that communicative competence is enough in itself. He insisted that the correct grammatical form is the only answer a teacher must encourage. Former students have also expressed this, saying that their accent often leads native English speakers to speak to them in "broken (pidgin) English" making them feel second class citizens.

In the light of all this it seems of paramount importance that teachers, in the position where they realise students will be learning for longer than the duration of one

full-time course, review all course content and expectation standards in a continuum.

> The test of a person's knowledge of a language is whether or not he can use it. Though he may be able to speak words and recite grammatical rules, if he cannot actually organise the words into intelligible discourse, he does not really understand the language. Language is a form of human behaviour, and language teaching is a mode of modifying human behaviour. One can learn a language only by speaking it, never by simply talking about it. Therefore, carefully guided practice and sustained confrontation with situations in which the learner needs to use language are essential to good language instruction.
>
> - Phenix, "Realms of Meaning" - Chapter V, "Ordinary Language", Pt 2.

At A.M.E.B. a pattern has been established for mid and post full-time course evaluation. Initial pre-course preparation is of course essential but it is only after these students are placed in classes that real preparation can begin.

Approximately in the middle of a course students are asked a number of questions. Hopefully, by this stage some confidence in teachers' abilities to listen has been established. The questions can be given as a written exercise, a tutorial discussion or interview etc. ("Course Evaluation" - See below).

Teachers then devote an afternoon session to realistically appraising comments and to re-allocation of course stresses. Mid-course evaluation allows adjustments to be made in the light of students' viewpoints. Errors of judgement are always made if one course predetermines the next, e.g. one group may ask for directed spelling, dictation, etc., while the next may ask for written composition with incidental spelling.

Post-course evaluation is a team affair and strengths and weaknesses are listed; innovations (e.g. methods/course books/guest speakers/ excursions) are evaluated, coverage of

four skills assessed, the basis for next course is forecast and reports are compiled.

Within the continuation or semi-accelerated class program, levels exist. Ideally, before proceeding to a higher level a student would be asked to show proficiency in his/her present level. This area is more difficult to evaluate as students have different individual expectations in the four skills.

At A.M.E.B. students proceed through Priority class to appropriate levels 1, 2, 3, based loosely on Situational English books but allowing for broader development. Some teachers prefer the thematic approach of priority strands and endeavour to continue this idea.

Evaluation techniques are needed to ascertain that student needs are being met by all approaches. The effectiveness of course content must be measured, not merely the course itself! It is clearly important that teachers should not mistakenly believe that following any one particular course book is, in itself, an evaluation of teaching effectiveness.

Students who have proceeded through these classes or who arrive at an advanced level are interviewed and assessed before being placed in an advanced class. The advanced classes vary from three hours five times a week to two hours three times a week or two hours twice a week allowing for part-time study best suited to the students' available time and for specialising in various areas.

Courses offered can vary the length of time a student is involved with the Centre.

Alternatives (Dependent on level)		Alternatives (Dependent on level & needs)
Priority 1	Basic Full-Time Course	Post semi-accelerated
Class 1		Extended levels
2		E.S.P.
3		Evening semi-accelerated
Pre-Course		Intermediate
Literacy		

Because evaluation is seen as a cyclical process and techniques are being constantly reviewed it would be helpful to hear of other T.E.S.L. teachers' efforts in this field.

Course Evaluation: Questions for Student Discussion

1. Was there enough/too much/not enough

   grammar
   reading
   writing ?
   conversation

2. Would you prefer more or fewer opportunities to hear other voices? (teachers/speakers)

3. Did you like the classes held in small groups?

4. Was the day too long/O.K.? Were there enough breaks? electives?

5. Is the course long enough?
   not long enough?
   too long?

6. Did the tapes help your English? in class?
   in language laboratory?

   Was there enough time?

7. Was the library class useful?

8. Is there any lesson you would like to do again?

9. Was there too much new English work and was it too fast?

10. Is homework valuable? What sort do you prefer?

11. Is testing valuable?

12. ARe films/excursions valuable?

13. Any other suggestion for course content?

- S. Martin, A.M.E.B., Vic.

"ASIAN LANGUAGE NOTES: SOME LIKELY AREAS OF DIFFICULTY FOR ASIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH"

- No. 1: Burmese, Chinese, Khmer, Vietnamese
  Out of print - reprinting late 1977

- No. 2: Tetum, Portuguese, Japanese
  (April 1977)

- In preparation: Thai/Lao, Indonesian/Malay, Korean (expected availability : early 1978)

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